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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this manual is to provide communities with some basic tools for achieving youth involvement by advocating a community approach which actively seeks to promote the well-being of young people. The importance of youth involvement in community programs is emphasized and a positive approach is recommended. The manual outlines the needs as well as the responsibilities of youths in the school, the community, and government. Training and needed skills and possible problems are also discussed. Several model youth programs in Wisconsin are described to show the significant function of the organizations and which tactics have been successful. (JAC)

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Wisconsin Association For Youth

Youth Involvement . . . a challenge for communities

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and
Wisconsin Council on Criminal Justice

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Preface

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1. Background

This manual is being provided to communities by the Wisconsin Council on Criminal Justice through the Wisconsin Association for Youth. It will be of special interest to community decision makers and elected officials such as governors and state legislators, county commissioners, mayors and city council members, and members of school boards. It may also interest agency administrators and technical personnel who plan, research and evaluate youth programs. Of course, it is also written for young people, to help them realize what it means to be members of their community.

Although a variety of opinions and ideas helped to develop this manual, it is being written primarily from the perspective of youth. The young authors have had experience in many kinds of community activities.

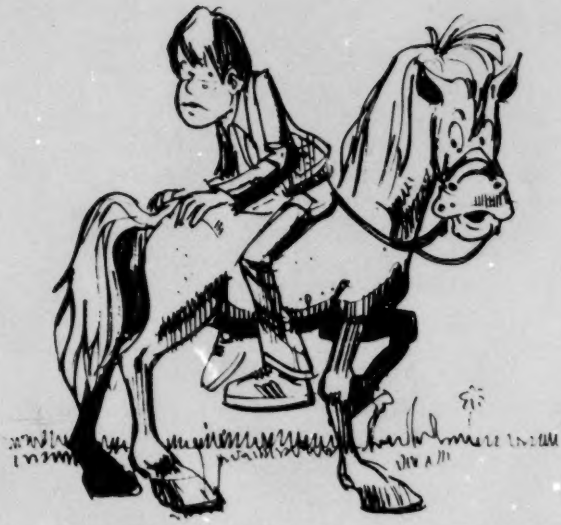
2. Introduction

The historical role of young people at the time of the development of our government structure is generally overlooked.[1] In the past, youths have been given little opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns. We need to focus more attention on the outdated concepts by which society governs youths.

Our participatory democracy needs to be broadened to include all elements of society. This constitutional principle is the cornerstone for youth participation: "Governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." As citizens of our democracy, young people have the right to participate in the decision-making processes related to their lives.

Most communities offer a variety of organizations and services that are intended to help youths and promote the betterment of the community. These services may include schools and agencies dealing with such matters as law enforcement, justice, corrections, recreation, personal growth and development services, and health services.

Traditionally, all these opportunities and activities, created to meet the needs of the youthful population, have been planned, implemented and evaluated by adults. Young people rarely have a say in how these services are organized. This process forces the adult policy-makers to make too many assumptions about what young people need and want.



Change is inevitable... It's the direction that counts!

3. Purpose

Through the years, youth involvement in the decision-making process has been overlooked. At times it has been given lip service, but youth participation has rarely been implemented effectively.

It makes sense for young people to be given the opportunity to express their opinions and be heard.

We begin with the assumption that BOTH the community and its young people will be better off if youths are included in the decision-making process. Youth participation in the community is a two-way street. Youths must give of themselves, and the community must open avenues for their involvement. In turn, the community better serves youths' needs and wants, and young people become an asset to the community.

Who decided what kinds of recreational equipment would be put in your neighborhood park?

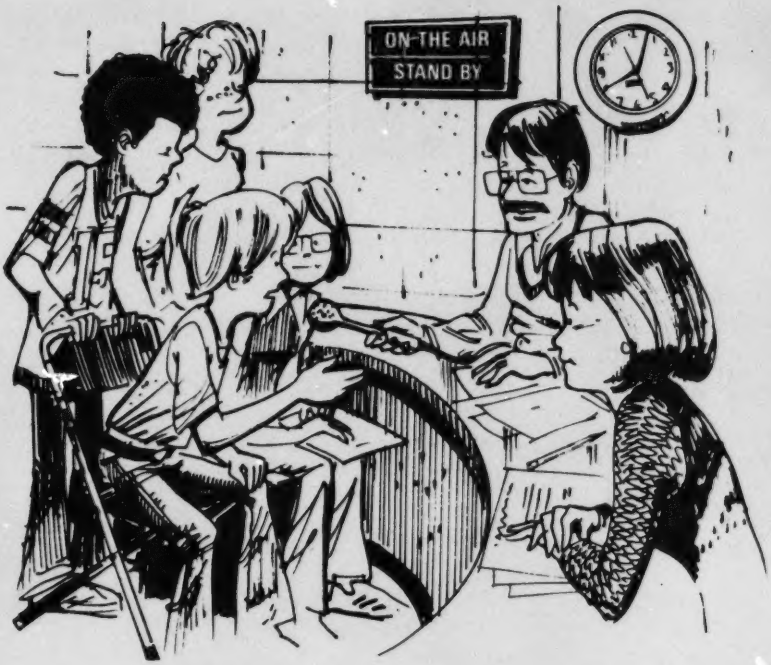
When young people complained about not having enough to do, who decided what new youth program should be created?

Who decided that what children want to learn at school isn't as important as what the school wants to teach?

Who set the rules for what happens to teens when they get in trouble?

Have you ever considered all the services your community provides for its youthful population? Isn't it possible that young people themselves would be interested in helping make decisions about what is in that park and about what classes their school should offer?

The purpose of this manual, then, is to provide communities with some basic tools for achieving youth involvement. We will show how the community, its programs and its policies will benefit, as well as how the young people themselves will benefit. We advocate a community approach to youth involvement—one which actively seeks to create conditions that promote the well-being of young people.


ON-THE AIR
STAND BY

4. What is Involvement?

Involvement is participation in an activity. It is taking a stake in what's happening around you and letting your opinions be heard. Involvement can be compared to almost any activity in which we participate—we take part because we have something to offer, our talents will be used and we will be recognized.

Involvement is a free choosing to interact. Anyone can become involved in a variety of activities: both constructive and destructive. Since this is a free choosing, fostering constructive, positive involvement is a challenge. Positive involvement is being part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Being involved is informative and helpful. By being involved, we become more aware of what is happening in society and we can help shape the values of our society.

5. Why Youth Involvement?

It has become increasingly apparent that all those who serve youth must work in a way that takes the feelings of youth into account if they are to fully accomplish their purposes. By involving youth in the planning process, adults no longer need to make assumptions about how young people feel. Adults need to recognize the fact that young people do care about the way in which decisions are made about them. Participation in decisions affecting one's own life is a necessary developmental experience.[2] Actual experience in the process gives young people the opportunity to help shape their own destiny.

Without youth input, even programs specifically designed to serve youths rarely respond to the needs of young people. Rather, these programs usually dictate to youths what kind of help they should want.[3] Exclusion of youths from participation in society often leads to alienation. This unnatural separation of youths from society tends to subject young people to forces which they can neither understand nor control. Thus, youths are compelled to obey rules made without their participation.

To exclude a portion of society from active involvement and participation tends to develop hostility, resentment, and alienation. Alienation leads to feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness. Often, this results in delinquent or anti-social behavior.

The key to decreasing alienation is developing a more effective means for youths to participate in society. By opening channels for youth participation in institutions such as schools and community volunteer agencies, the community can help young persons find opportunities to participate actively in the world around them. Youths can feel a greater amount of control over their own lives.

Youth involvement is needed because of the increasing difficulty young people find today in making the transition from adolescence to constructive adult life. Adolescents have been isolated from the adult world. Pathways through which young people might move into mature roles in society are blocked.

We need to develop alternative environments for youths' transitions to adulthood. Giving youths the education and skills necessary to become responsible members of society may require a rethinking of how we educate our young citizens. Youths are dependent on schools and colleges to provide their general social environment. Industrialization and

urbanization have lessened the responsibility of the family structure in this area. But school systems, as now constituted, offer an incomplete context for the accomplishment of many important facets of maturation.[4] Youths need to develop social skills as well as cognitive skills. Community involvement can help fill the gap in our educational institutions. Involvement gives youths the experience needed to develop their self awareness and social skills.

Community involvement gives youths practical experience to help broaden their horizons. Working with adults, young people become more informed about their community. By later adolescence, young people feel that they can move toward adult status only if they are taken seriously in the community and are allowed, after some fashion, to participate responsibly in its affairs.[5]

Involvement also broadens the viewpoint that youths have on the world around them. Through the exchange of ideas and opinions with others, they can become aware of new values and perspectives. These values will help shape future generations.

6. A Positive Approach

The first and most important step toward making youth involvement a reality in the community is a positive attitude . . . a positive attitude in both the community and among youths. It is a challenge to foster an attitude among community leaders to accept youth input. It will be necessary to analyze your community's present attitude toward young people and work from there to develop a plan to get youths involved.

Initially, it may mean making contacts with others who might feel the same way about youth participation. Possible contacts may be social workers, juvenile court personnel, guidance counselors and other school personnel, county board supervisors, city council members or members of local youth service programs. Discuss the basic concepts and opinions about how to involve young people, and establish a list of allies. Without a core group of people who truly believe in and are committed to the betterment of both youths and your community through the involvement of young people, not much progress can be made. Insure that at least one or two adults who **truly** believe youth input is essential are willing to give some time and energy to making things happen.

Next, identify those organizations, agencies, and committees in which young people can become involved. Determine what role youths can play to benefit themselves and the organizations. The adults must determine if they want real youth representation or token representation. If it is token, youths will not stay involved because they will feel useless.

Keep the following things in mind when planning roles for young people. Some characteristics of more successful projects are that they:

- Give youths tasks they can identify with;
- Offer them a type of participation that demands responsible action on their part;
- Provide opportunities to make decisions that affect themselves and others; and
- Let them experience the consequences of their own actions and decisions.[9]

Once the group has a specific task in mind, it will need to search out those youths who are interested in getting involved. Locating young people need not be an overwhelming problem, but there is sometimes a problem reaching those who **truly** want to be involved. One way is to work through already established institutions and youth-serving agencies:

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schools, YMCA's, YWCA's, social service agencies, recreation programs, etc. Another way to begin may be by using public address announcements in the schools or putting posters in places where young people go. Make these as interesting and eye-catching as possible.

Once initial contact with the young people has been made and there is an investment of time and energy from adults, winning the confidence of the youths is the next challenge. In order to function effectively, youths need to feel confident in the group (and in what it's doing) and, in turn, the group will have to show that it is confident in them. A common misconception among adults who work with teenage youth is that they themselves must act like teenagers. Young people need adult models, adults who take themselves seriously as adults. Likewise, they need adults who take young people seriously.[7] Establish credibility with the youths.

At first, some youths may feel inhibited about expressing what they really think. They may feel inferior or they may look on adults as "narcs" who will turn them in if the youths reveal any of the delinquent acts they may have committed. Research indicates that most youths experiment with delinquency once or twice and stop.[8] Adult acceptance of all interested youths—even those in trouble—is essential. Encourage them to open up and discuss issues freely.

The most important aspect in approaching young persons who may want to be involved is to treat them as a resource to help solve problems and not to label them as the problem. Say, "You can help us. We need your involvement," instead of "You're in trouble. You need help and should get involved." This is so important. Essentially, youths see themselves as others see them. Negative labeling forces youths to become defensive and turn away. Developing a positive attitude from the beginning is very important. Make youths feel that they are competent and that they belong.

Now that there is a group of interested adults and youths and a specific task for them to deal with, motivation is the next step. Ownership is important here—when you facilitate group activities and let the group take responsibility, they gain a sense of ownership needed to operate effectively. Be sure the youths are involved in all phases of the activity: planning, implementation and evaluation.

Recognize the "self-interest" of each involved person. Assess what is most important to each and why each is in-

volved. Realize that each person has his/her own agenda and expectations. Listen to what each has to say.

Young people are energetic and imaginative. They are an excellent source for program ideas. Encourage them to be creative!

This positive approach toward youth involvement, then, can be viewed as a method of **positive prevention. The best way to prevent juvenile delinquency is to help young people develop their own potential**.

Your time and energy are investments in the future of your community as well as investments in the future lives of young people.

7. Needs and Responsibilities of the Community

Adults and community leaders must be made more aware of the value and the necessity of youth input in the decision-making process. This may mean taking a risk, both politically and personally, for community leaders who want to advocate youth involvement. Since youths are not granted statutory rights, and since they cannot express their opinions at the polls, someone must represent them. This is the most important role of the community and its leaders: to open up avenues for youth representation.

It is the responsibility of the community to take action and organize a group to look out for youth concerns. The community must decide for itself what combination of programs would be most suitable and workable. The "positive approach toward youth involvement," outlined in Chapter Six, will be beneficial in fulfilling the community's responsibilities. The community must be willing to expend its energy and resources to create an environment which allows for active youth participation. If the time, energy and money are spent on more youth involvement projects, they will not have to be spent on expanding juvenile courts and detention halls.

Young people need the ability to identify with their community and the happenings in that community. The community needs to give youths the opportunity to practice good citizenship at an early age so that youths can fully develop their potential and be a real asset to the community. It must take the responsibility for educating youths in the workings of the governmental processes. In our democratic society, young people **can** have a place, and the community must make it available to them at their level. Involvement is the best way to achieve this. Then, youths will become knowledgeable about the workings of their political environment and know how they can participate in its processes.

In most communities, roles for youth involvement have been developed chiefly through voluntary associations. Youth volunteers can join a number of organizations that bring them into active relations with community needs: churches and groups involved in recreation, study, community service and civic improvement. In each of these, youths will not only be taking part in an activity but will also be weighing values that will become part of their personalities for life.

When identifying activities and roles for youths, the community must realize that programs which single out delin-

' think they'll listen to us?
'you kidding? They'd probably be afraid we'd open our mouths!
YOUTH POLICY & PLANNING BOARD
Adults Only!
MEETING in PROGRESS DO NOT DISTURB!
US MAIL

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quents or potential delinquents for special treatment seem to intensify the very behavior they want to change.[9] Youths seem to identify with the negative label that sets them apart and are determined to live up to it. Try to involve a variety of youths from varying backgrounds. Positive influence from peers will benefit all the young participants.

It is the responsibility of the community to ensure coordination and communication between all of its related agencies and organizations. This is important to help keep youths involved in a variety of activities. When agencies cooperate, more avenues for youth involvement open up and the number of involved youths grows. Young people can then instruct their peers as to the workings and goals of the specific organization or agency in which they are involved. By sharing this information, each learns more about services available in their community.

When teaching youths about the workings of an agency, an association, or the community itself, it is important to put yourself in the place of the new people and determine what they really need to know in order to increase their interest and enthusiasm.

The designated advisor of youth affairs, as a leader, should be responsible for: a) giving the young people an accomplishable job; b) giving them an awareness of the effectiveness of the organization and the good work it is doing; and c) giving them every possible opportunity to learn that they are making a difference. Adult influence, advice and example is very important and should not be overlooked. Without these, young people will not develop the qualities necessary to be adults.

Find real opportunities for youths to do real community work in which their services will be regarded neither with condescension nor sentimentality, so they may grow in the spirit of community service.

8. Needs and Responsibilities of Youth

As our society becomes more and more complex, the problems within it also become more complex. Young people need to learn how to deal with the problems and challenges of our rapidly changing society. Oftentimes, adults do not fully understand the concerns and problems today's youths face. However, in most cases these adults are the ones making decisions that affect the youthful population. Hence, the 'right' decision in the eyes of the adults may conflict with what the youths affected by the decision feel is right.

One approach to keep up with the changing needs is to let youths themselves help decide what they want and need. As we have stressed before, adult influence and advice is necessary, but youths need the chance for self-expression. Their opinions and ideas deserve to be heard and considered.

Participation in the community and inclusion in the decision-making process is a basic need of youths. This opportunity will give them a constructive means of self-expression and allow young people to have an investment in their community. We have all seen the destructive acts that arise when youths do not feel any investment in their community. The most obvious is the rising rate of vandalism. The youths who destroyed the park equipment probably didn't do it because they hated the park. Rather, they felt they had no investment in the park equipment. These destructive acts may have been a way for the youths to get someone to take notice. It's as though the youths were saying, "Hey, I'm alive!"

The major responsibility of young people is to find a constructive means for self-expression. They must learn to take responsible action and use their energy in a positive manner.

By finding their place in the democratic structure of our society, youths may be sure their input is heard in the decision-making process. It is the responsibility of all youths to make sure that what they have to say is heard. They must not sit back and wait until some indefinite time to take a place in the community. They must take some initiative and participate actively in the world around them. By being responsible and learning what is happening in their community, by helping to solve its problems, young people can learn to make decisions of their own.

They must realize that discussing issues and acting as a catalyst for change must be done in a positive manner to

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achieve a long term impact on the leaders' attitudes toward youth involvement. Riots, sit-ins, and other radical means of voicing opinions receive immediate attention but generally leave a negative impression in the eyes of the community.

Young persons interested in getting involved will need support. If the community leaders have not designated an agency, organization or committee to look out for youth concerns, it may be a bit more difficult to have an impact on decisions and let opinions be heard. Nonetheless, this is no reason for copping out and not taking part in the community.

Youths should seek out other interested peers for support. Recruitment techniques stated in Chapters Six and Nine will be helpful. Youths should get together and form a coalition of 'interested youths'. Such a coalition will make it easier to tackle problems and deal with common concerns. Group support will help gain needed recognition and credibility. Working alone can be frustrating and is often unsuccessful. If all those interested in ensuring youth participation and representation in decision-making processes work together as a team, they can achieve their common goal.

The group may need to seek out the help of an interested adult or group of adults. The role of the adult(s) is important to teach the youths the structure of the community and how it works. The adult should not take over any of the youths' responsibilities but instead should act as a 'shoulder' for the group to lean on. An interested teacher, parent, friend or professional from a youth-serving agency can serve as the adult advisor. Youths should ask for their assistance by explaining the concerns and goals of the group and showing how the adult can help the group.

It is important for youths involved to seek out the opinions of their peers. The opinions they express need to be representative of the feelings of the majority of youths. They must look out for the best interests of the total youth population. Working as a team with a number of youths can help accomplish this.

Involved young people should share information and influence their peers. Using those involved to recruit others can help strengthen the organization and solve the problem of rapid turnover in youth membership.

Being involved, youths can learn to examine themselves in situations in which they can act and be treated as responsible adults. In these situations they learn to deal with people and

form relationships that are different from their relationships with family, peers and teachers.

Young people need to believe in themselves. They need to realize the importance of being ACTIVE MEMBERS of society. Youth input needs to be viewed positively by the adults—especially the community leaders.

Young people can take pride in what they achieve through community involvement. An investment in the community by youths will help make the community more productive for them.

9. Training and Skills Needed

Young or old, people wanting to get involved need to learn some new skills and get some training in the area in which they will be working. Since we view youth involvement as a two-way street, we feel it is equally important for the community, as well as for the youths, to develop new skills.

The community must focus its attention on strengthening the means by which schools and other community agencies interested in children and youths can plan together and learn from one another. To make sure youth input is sought and utilized, changes may have to be made in the way policies and programs are administered.

Special attention should focus on how the pattern of community services provides for healthy personality development. Communication and coordination between the existing youth-serving agencies is important. Contradiction or duplication of services will confuse and often discourage youths. Services should work in a united effort to develop a healthy personality for those served.

Important, too, is the constant recruitment of young people. Recruitment of new members not only depends on the program leader but also on the youths themselves. The involved young people and the adult leader will have to give potential members background information about the program and be sure they understand the goals and objectives of the organization. When recruiting new people:

a. Have meetings that leave people wanting to come back.
b. Avoid personal jokes and "remember when" stories at meetings. People who have been around for a while shouldn't huddle together in their own groups. They should make a conscious effort to scatter around and talk to new people.
c. Make personal contact with new members. Whether or not someone stays involved with an organization often depends on whether they feel comfortable with other members.
d. List various organizations, cliques, and interest groups. How many of them are represented in your group? Which ones do you have a chance to unite with, even if only on one specific issue? Approach some of the leaders of the cliques and discuss some common interests.
e. Divide the work as much as possible.

f. Make room for people at all levels of commitment.
g. Find out how your group looks to outsiders.[10]

Both youths and adults will need to gain leadership skills. Development of personal stance and self-confidence is important in this regard. The clarification of personal values will also help potential leaders to express their opinions effectively. Much more can be accomplished when the young people believe in themselves and gain needed self-respect. The development of a healthy personality among youths and adults is essential for effective involvement.

Workshops and training sessions can be established to provide skills in personal growth and development. It will take time for these sessions and workshops to fully develop leadership ability. A local social service agency may be of help in training potential leaders or perhaps a school organization offers some type of leadership training. By creating a leadership training program to meet your needs or by taking advantage of those offered by other organizations, you can prepare youths to accept a responsible role in your community.

Learning problem solving methods and developing the skills necessary to use these methods effectively is important for success. When problems are encountered, the following method often proves effective:

1. **Define the Problem** so that it includes a clear and accurate description of the present condition, state, or circumstances which are seen as a problem. The definition must also include statements which describe the future condition, state, or circumstances that are desired. This first step is essential to the rest of the problem solving steps. Change from the present state of affairs to the desired state of affairs becomes the goal of the problem solving.
2. **Formulate a list of alternatives** for bringing about desired changes. Brainstorming is an excellent way to create this list. Try to come up with as many alternatives as possible by approaching the problem from several perspectives. Some factors to consider are: What human behaviors will have to change? Who are the people we will attempt to change? What resources such as time, information, money, and cooperation will be needed? Who are the key people who have some degree of control over the present situation?
3. **Create a Plan for Action.** Alternatives must be sorted out and linked together in a plan that all can agree on. In sorting

them, consider costs, time and energy involved, political implications, kinds of people and skills you need, etc. Write down the steps you must take, in what order they will be taken, who will do what, when it will be done, and how you will know if it is done.

4. **Implement the Plan** that you have agreed upon. Communication and coordination skills are key in this step. Someone must attend to maintaining energy levels and key efforts. Flexibility and appreciating all gains made should be emphasized.

5. **Evaluate the success** of your problem solving efforts. Attending to all information about the present problematic situation and recording signs of change towards the desired situation is the heart of evaluation. This should be done throughout all steps. Two points should be remembered: (a) success does not necessarily equal solution; improvements in conditions are always successes; (b) there may be unintended benefits from some activities; these also constitute success.

There are some basic rules to the brainstorming method mentioned in Step 2 of the problem solving formula. Brainstorming means that everyone just throws out ideas as fast as they can think of them. No one comments or criticizes the ideas at this point. Try to be creative. One person should act as a recorder, writing everything down. Once you have all ideas down, analyze all of them and determine which idea will work best.

It is most important that the team of young people attain a working understanding of how their community decides and acts. When faced with a concern, they must learn to research the power structure. They will need to be informed about what happens "behind the scenes" when a political issue arises. Information about local leaders and "who controls what" is important.

Understanding *Roberts Rules of Order* and the process by which committees make decisions is also necessary. Role-playing exercises can give participants practical experience in the operations of a committee. Role playing is a good way to let the youth "step into a different pair of shoes" and look at certain situations from different perspectives. The skill of negotiating and compromising with people at different levels may be explored during the role play. By attending county board meetings and city council meetings, young people will see how their local leaders operate.

In dealing with others at all levels, young people must develop effective communication skills. Youths need to express ideas clearly, both in speech and in writing. Active listening is a vital part of good communication. Youths must avoid being too quick to make assumptions about what others are thinking. They should establish clear lines for communicating.

Using the media becomes important to help your group gain credibility. Experience in writing press releases and getting to know local media personnel will help.

Since most volunteer youth programs have little funding, techniques for fund-raising will need to be investigated. Fund-raising need not be an overwhelming task. A positive attitude and energy will help.

By learning vital skills and developing a healthy personality, young people will become responsible individuals who will be better able to "take" modern life and therefore produce such changes in it as will improve the circumstances of later generations.

10. Roles for Youth

In the past, roles for youth participation in decision-making processes have been primarily limited to the school. Almost every junior-senior high school has an elected student government association or student council to represent the student population. The student representatives voice opinions when decisions are being made about their school. However, these organizations generally have very little authority and have almost no say when school policies are set. Their role is primarily to organize events and activities taking place within the school, e.g., proms, homecoming celebrations, class reunions, etc. This is not to demean student governments but to point out that there is potential within the organization that needs to be developed. Students should work to strengthen the credibility and impact of their student government associations.

Cities that have more than one high school can strengthen youth participation in policy-setting decisions by developing an "intra-city student organization." This organization, comprised of student representatives from each school, convenes to discuss issues common to all the schools. Since the local school board serves as the policy-maker for all the schools in the city, the intra-city student organization should seek youth representation on the school board.

To achieve youth representation on school boards, whether as voting or non-voting members, will take time and energy. There may be political implications involved and some adults may be reluctant to give young people this opportunity. However, youth representation and participation on local school boards is an accomplishable goal and has been successful in many communities willing to try it.

All these roles for youths within the structure of the school system are essential to help the schools better meet the needs of their students.

However, youths may become involved in decision making in many ways outside of the school system as well. Involvement in community activities is important. All of the community's youth-serving agencies, including social services, juvenile justice, law enforcement, recreation and youth programs established on a community-wide basis should have youth input when making decisions that affect the lives of young people. Roles for youths can be developed in the com-

mittees that govern these agencies as well as the agencies' boards of directors.

One of the most important roles for youths in helping make decisions is at the county and city levels. Comparable to the situation with local school boards, convincing city and county officials to accept youth input is a challenge. Youths need to prove that their opinions deserve to be heard and acted upon, and that they are competent decision-makers.

A "committee on youth concerns" or "youth advisory board" established at the levels of the community government will ensure decisions are made in the best interest of youths. After establishing credibility and gaining support of local officials, youths should submit a proposal to the county board or the city council to ask that a committee on youth be recognized as a permanent committee within the structure of county/city government and that any matter concerning youths be referred to the committee before a decision is made. A youth advisory board comprised of youth representatives from each geographical section of the community can operate in an ad-advisory board composed of youth representatives from each as well.

There are many other organizations, clubs, groups, and societies which count upon youth input as a basis for their entire operation. In these organizations, youths are faced with the challenge of developing, improvising and expanding youth programs.

The Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts of America are two organizations in which youth input is sought and used. Youths involved gain many benefits from their membership. Scouting builds character, induces self-respect, motivates creativity and prepares young people for the leadership positions they will assume in the future.

The YWCA and YMCA (Young Women's/Men's Christian Association) offer a wide variety of programs designed to involve youths. These are some of the largest youth organizations in the nation. Check with your local office for details on the programs and activities they offer.

"Youth in Government" is a national YMCA program which offers high school age youths the opportunity to experience and understand our democratic process of legislation. The students elect state officers, write bills, hold debates on proposed legislation and vote on the bills involved in a role

playing situation. "Youth in Government" is directed by a committee made up of 12-15 young people.

Many civic-minded organizations, such as the Kiwanis and Lions, utilize the talents of young people and ask them to go into the community and speak to younger children about such things as smoking, pollution and other community concerns which will soon be the concerns of younger children.

There are also services which offer to help young people locate activities of interest to them. These services help youths find jobs and take part in volunteer work and activity clubs.

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Other activities in which youths can find roles for active involvement are:

- Boys' Club
- Girls' Club
- Church youth groups
- Teen Centers
- Parks
- Recreation
- Future Farmers of America
- Planned Parenthood
- Hospitals
- Hotlines
- Advisory committees
- 4-H
- Neighborhood youth groups

YOUTH INPUT IS THE KEY TO MANY SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONS. IF YOUTHS FEEL NEEDED AND KNOW THEY CAN BE COUNTED ON, THEY WILL PARTICIPATE MORE. YOUTHS DON'T WANT TO FEEL AS IF EVERYTHING IS DONE FOR THEM. INSTEAD, IT MUST BE DONE **WITH** THEM.

11. Problems Encountered

Overcoming the many obstacles that are encountered along the road toward youth involvement is a difficult and often discouraging task. A beneficial youth involvement program should not fold up merely because of events which present problems to it.

A prevalent problem is apathy on the part of either the community or the youths. Apathy—a general listless lack of interest—can be combated only through a definite effort to make the program and activities appealing. These activities will appeal to youths only if the young people involved are allowed to take responsibility and control their own destiny in the organizations. If they are not given such responsibility, they won't want to participate because they will feel as if they're carrying out orders. Giving them the opportunity to make decisions regarding the direction their group will take will help to motivate them.

Crucial, too, is the setting of a goal. The goal should be an endpoint toward which all efforts are aimed. This destination could be achieved through a series of short-range projects and efforts which provide different and interesting activities for the youths involved. Ensure, though, that the youths are helping make decisions about what activities and projects to do.

Lack of commitment on the part of the adult advisor or on the part of the youths will present a great many problems. Because young people are all too quick to deem a project a "failure" when results are not immediately recognized, they need the reassurance and guidance of an adult. They must learn that all hopes are not instantly realized; some worthwhile projects take years to be accomplished. The practical experience youths gain in this area will benefit them for years to come.

Statements, such as "I went there to help, but there wasn't anything for me to do," are a problem. The young people who sincerely want to be involved should have every opportunity to participate. They shouldn't be turned away.

Rapid turnover in membership of the youth organizations is also a problem. As soon as directors and advisors become pleased with the membership, older members leave to find work, to go to school, etc., which leaves the organization without committed members. Therefore, a constant recruitment drive should be maintained, always encouraging new members to join up and participate. No youth organization can

be too large. Encourage each member to bring friends to activities and meetings. If all members have a function, a large membership can indicate a successful youth program.

Transportation is an obstacle to be reckoned with. Youths involved in a program must have a way to and from meetings and activities, especially in the winter. Parents and adult advisors can help in the all-out effort to provide all interested persons with rides.

Disappointment and frustration, too, are found in youth programs when things "just don't quite turn out." However, in learning to deal with the frustrations and solving the problems, youths will be better able to cope with the additional difficulties they will experience in adulthood. Once the disappointment and frustration yield to accomplishment and achievement, the youths will feel both satisfaction and pride.

12. Model Youth Programs

The youth programs documented in this section are to serve as examples of the various types of youth organizations that have been established in Wisconsin. The examples show the significant function of the organization, what has been successful and what has not.

4-H Youth Development Programs
University of Wisconsin-Extension

When 4-H began, at the turn of the century, clubs were primarily in rural areas and worked to teach youths practical skills in agriculture and home economics. Today, 4-H has widely expanded to include many programs for young men and women in urban and suburban as well as rural areas. 4-H clubs in all 72 counties of Wisconsin involve a total of 80,000 young people and over 30,000 leaders each year. Ninety-five percent of Wisconsin's 4-H clubs carry out some community-focused activity. These activities include:

Environmental projects, such as cleaning up, protecting and conserving roads, parks and waysides and restoring other environmental aspects of the community.

Programs for the elderly, handicapped or other special groups. These include entertaining members of nursing homes; "adopting" elderly or handicapped persons as their friends; doing favors and giving gifts of flowers, house plants and food; and providing recreation for elderly citizens.

Health and safety projects. Sponsoring vaccination clinics for animals when veterinarian services are not available; educating younger children about nutrition; and presenting poison prevention programs to students in the primary grades are some of the major projects in this area.

Other humanitarian projects. Money for Christmas gifts for needy families and for charities dealing with cancer, heart disease and muscular dystrophy is raised through community auctions, quilt contests and other fund-raising methods.

4-H'ers learn about government by working with their town officials to accomplish tasks. In Dane County, a club sought to protect Nine Springs Creek from further housing development. They worked closely with local officials and approached townspeople to make them more aware of the natural

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resource. Youth in Chippewa lobbied before government officials to put traffic lights at dangerous intersections in their town. Despite difficulties in finding funding, they were successful.

Young people in big cities, such as Milwaukee, are given the opportunity to explore nature through classes, workshops and field trips. Window sill gardens in 48 elementary school classrooms helped Fond du Lac youth learn about gardening. These city youths generally didn't have the space to grow their own gardens.

Bicycle repair clinics and workshops on bicycle safety, pet care, sewing, money management and smart shopping are other activities of the 4-H clubs.

An expanded foods and nutrition program has stressed good eating habits, encouraged personal growth, and fostered parent-child interaction.

All the club activities are examples of the 4-H philosophy: "Kids learning life skills by doing things and getting involved." Because of these community development projects, youths have more respect for other people's property; they are better able to talk and work with others; they are more interested in community concerns; and they have a better understanding of how government works.

Council for Youth Action
Community Action Program of Rock and Walworth Counties

Problems with truancy, high drop-out rates and a heightened incidence of senseless vandalism in Rock and Walworth Counties indicated to officials that youths were not finding relevance in the systems and institutions in which they were expected to participate.

The Council for Youth Action sought to bring youths, adults and systems together in a joint effort to resolve the many youth-related problems.

Youth forums were held within high school classrooms to give students the opportunity to openly discuss issues and concerns with adults and representatives from youth-serving systems. Through the forums, the group sought to identify youth concerns and develop practical proposals to deal with the problems. To implement the proposals in the community, youth issues group were formed, involving both interested youths and adult members.

This is a pilot project in which the entire community is in-

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volved in the development and implementation of solutions to youth-related problems. Because the project is so new, assessment data is not yet available. However, programs tried elsewhere in the nation have proven successful.

Youth Counseling Center (YCC)
Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, Inc.
5460 North 64th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The Silver Spring Center has operated as a non-profit organization since 1958, serving the citizens on the northwest side of Milwaukee.

Besides providing recreation and social activities to the 150 teenage members, the center has recently organized a Youth Council. Youth Council members were given training in leadership, communication and problem solving skills.

To help solve the many problems facing youth in their area, the Youth Council took on the major task of planning and implementing a peer counseling program. The Council surveyed 342 students from area junior and senior high schools as to the need for a peer counseling service. Results showed the majority of the youths would utilize such services. The survey also showed a need for sex education, tutoring and pregnancy programs, and programs to deal with the abuse of drugs and alcohol.

The Youth Council then sought funding for the development of the peer counseling program, which they opened under the name of the Youth Counseling Center (YCC). The Youth Counseling Center consists of five to eight well-trained, certified teens working as peer counselors and two young adults serving as crisis counselors. The main thrust of YCC is to help youths become involved in life decisions. A telephone hotline was established, and counselors work in the schools and on the streets to reach young people in need of their services.

The objectives of YCC are to reduce teenage pregnancies, develop self-awareness, help youths to deal with family and personal problems, and train other youths interested in becoming peer counselors.

Junior Staff—Youth Advisory Board
Brown County Youth Resources Council
Green Bay, Wisconsin

The Brown County Youth Resources Council was established in February of 1976. The task of the council was to help coordinate efforts of the existing youth-serving agencies. They worked to promote youth input and participation in the decision-making process. Also, they wanted to make young citizens of the community more aware of the agencies that offer help and services for youths.

The Council was made up of a 25-member volunteer board and three staff members, each assigned to a committee. Three committees were defined: Systems Modification, Youth Advocacy and Public Education. Each committee of volunteers was designated to work in their respective areas as a catalyst for change.

The Youth Resources Council (YRC) proceeded in numerous directions concurrently to accomplish their goals. The two programs documented below were most directy related to advocating youth involvement.

The Junior Staff. The Brown County Youth Resources Council consciously planned roles in which youths could become involved. Since it served the entire county, it wanted to ensure youth representation from all areas of the county. Using the existing organizations and agencies, the Council got names of interested youths and began to recruit young people to serve in Junior Staff positions. Sixteen junior staff people were hired, each one representing a different area of the county. The Youth Work Experience Project paid for these young people to be hired by the YRC.

The role of the Junior Staff was to work in their respective neighborhoods identifying problems that existed and, with the assistance of senior staff, to implement solutions to these problems.

Junior Staff members were given one week of orientation and training. They met with agency and community leaders to learn about what programs were serving youths and what was being done in the community to deal with youth problems.

The young people identified unemployment, boredom, vandalism and alcohol and drug abuse as the major problems. With the cooperation of local job service representatives, they were able to help find temporary and part-time jobs for about

75 youths that summer. This was accomplished by publicizing their services and talking with peers about where they could get jobs and how to apply. They also contacted neighborhood proprietors to see if they needed help, and they encouraged the hiring of youths.

The other three areas of concern: boredom, vandalism and alcohol and drug abuse, were more difficult to deal with in the short time provided. Since the program was limited to the summer months, junior staffers could only hope to begin spreading lots of information.

The Junior Staff felt that to have at least some impact on boredom and vandalism they could help other young people find more constructive ways to get involved in the community. They also relayed to their peers what they had learned about services available for youths and referred those youths in need of help to the appropriate agencies.

On several occasions, this kind of broad-based contact with youths led to opportunities for the Junior Staff to voice opinions to community leaders. These chances to meet with the mayor, county executive, police officers, superintendent of schools, and businessmen appear to have been the first step taken by the community to listen to and involve youths. This was perhaps the basis for the later success of the Youth Advisory Board.

The biggest problems of the Junior Staff were a lack of supervision and direction and the setting of overly idealistic goals. They realized they had to work in a practical, realistic manner to gain credibility and solve the problems that concerned them.

The Youth Advisory Board. After that summer, the ex-junior staffers volunteered to meet and work at getting more youth input in decision making processes. They served as the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to the Youth Resources Council and worked to gain community recognition. As an advisory board they were involved in a variety of tasks.

Most youths served on one of the YRC committees. Systems Modification, Youth Advocacy and Public Education committees all had youth membership.

The young people helped organize workshops and training programs for other youths. These sessions taught personal development, as well as ways to become involved in the community. Some of the members of the YAB served as facilitators at these workshops.

The Youth Advisory Board strove to express common opinions and advocate youth needs to community leaders. Some spoke at the Juvenile Code Revision meetings and others attended or facilitated local, regional and state-wide workshops on youth involvement.

It was at one such workshop that youth involvement reached a turning point in Brown County. Top officials, including the mayor, police chief, juvenile officers and county board supervisors gathered and discussed issues with young people. At this workshop, "Partnerships in Decision-Making," the Youth Advisory Board was able to gain credibility with the leaders of their community.

During this same time, the County Board was reviewing budgets. They had just designated a committee to explore the existing youth-serving agencies and check for duplication of services. Anticipating that some budgets could be cut, the "Youth Programs Study Committee" was organized and some of these county board members attended the "Partnerships in Decision-Making" workshop.

"When I saw one alderman turn to the other and say, 'Why don't we have any young people on the Youth Programs Study Committee? I think we should see what they think about the programs we are studying.' I was just thrilled," explained one young participant. "I knew the ball would continue to roll. They wanted our input and were asking for it."

The committee of county board supervisors did follow through and ask the young people for input. In a combined meeting, they discussed the function and benefits of the existing agencies and whether or not these agencies met the needs of youths.

When it came time for the Youth Programs Study Committee to make their final report to the county board, the young people recommended that a Commission on Youth, composed of supervisors, citizens and youths, be established as a standing comittee to the county board to help make decisions on all matter relating to youths. To ensure youth representation, a 13-member Youth Advisory Board was appointed to work with the Commission on Youth. All members of this newly-formed County Youth Advisory Board were appointed by the County Executive through a recommendation from the area supervisor. The youths interested in serving on the county YAB wrote letters asking their aldermen to submit their name for appointment. Youth members of the Youth

Resources Council helped develop the proposal for the new Youth Advisory Board and recruited youths for nomination by working in the schools.

Young people in Brown County had finally received county recognition and status. Presently the Commission on Youth and County Youth Advisory Board have been functioning for about two years. The biggest problems they have faced are lack of direction from the county board (which has lessened their credibility) and rapid turnover in youth membership (which has hindered the organizational development at the committees).

The Brown County Youth Resources Council still operates as a volunteer board, but staff funding has dissolved.

This is an extremely brief synopsis of YRC efforts at youth involvement. However, it is apparent that the success of youth participation in Brown County was achieved through clearly defining roles for youths and consciously developing an attitude which was receptive of youth participation.

Kenosha County Advocates for Youth, Inc. (KCAY)
Kenosha, Wisconsin

The Kenosha County Advocates for Youth, Inc. began in 1975 as a result of a coalition of Kenoshans concerned with juvenile delinquency. At that time, Kenosha had one of the highest juvenile crime rates in Wisconsin. At first, KCAY served as a youth service bureau essentially concerned with advocacy issues. It now has adopted an employment-oriented perspective, although it still deals with youth advocacy. Some of the many KCAY projects are listed below.

The Youth Service Bureau's primary aim of preventing juvenile delinquency was accomplished through youth involvement. The bureau operated an outreach program of information and referral. It provided the community with several task forces regarding leisure time usage, employment activities, career education and diversion. The bureau also set up juvenile problem-solving workshops.

The Kenosha Youth Action Project formed youth groups to identify needs of youths and advocate a strategy for change.

The Youth Work Experience Project employed economically disadvantaged youths during the summer.

The Energy Conservation Project attempted to increase the amount of energy conservation practiced in the community. Projects included the reopening of a recycling center and the

winterization of energy-inefficient, low-income homes.

The Jobs for Drop-outs Program was implemented to provide drop-outs with work experience. Drop-outs were provided with supervised employment in non-profit agencies, and they were given career information and guidance from counselors.

The Summer Youth Community Mural Project stemmed from a meeting of the Juvenile Problem-Solving Workshop, held by KCAY. After lengthy discussion, the youths selected mural painting as the project they'd like to be involved in. With the help of the building owners and 16 area businesses, Kenosha youths were able to create a beautiful work of art.

The KCAY Occupation Center attempts to deal with the problem of youth unemployment by matching available jobs to individual abilities and preferences. It also strives to reduce barriers to youth employment by providing a wide variety of employment services to youths. Those at the Occupation Center were greatly amazed at the real dimension of the problem for Kenosha youths. Youths from all backgrounds expressed their desperation and inability to find jobs, lack of even the most basic job-seeking skills, lack of help in planning careers, and unrealistic expectation about the world of work. The youths said that they'd not received help from schools and other programs. Those who were not ready for employment received job preparatory counseling, skills assessment, and career planning. These youths were referred to employers only when staff felt that they were job-ready. Employers appreciated this process, since they were not swamped with ineligible applicants who could not adequately handle job tasks. Within one year, the Center provided services to well over 1,000 youths, and it currently holds more than 700 applications for youths seeking employment and youths currently employed.

The Occupation Center received numerous calls from individual homeowners who requested snowshoveling assistance after a winter of record-breaking snows. Local radio stations aired public service announcements stating that the center had help available. Applications from area youths were screened and youths who agreed to make themselves available were selected. One hundred youths were assigned to 369 temporary snow removal jobs, with payment left to the discretion of the individual homeowner.

The Western Kenosha Youth Development Project of KCAY

sponsors several programs, including the Recreation Program, the objective of which is to increase youth participation in activities that are socially constructive, personally rewarding and self-image improving. The staff of the Recreation Program arrange supervised activities such as athletics, dances, roller skating, films, karate, arts and crafts, gun safety, ice days, campfires, stock car building and archery.

The Kenosha County Advocates for Youth has enjoyed a great deal of success in its four years of operation. It has implemented a variety of youth involvement programs which have begun to whittle away at the alarming rate of delinquency among youths in Kenosha County.

13. Conclusion

If we truly want youth participation and involvement and we truly want youths to be represented in the decision-making processes that affect them, we must put our efforts and energy toward educating youths to be responsible citizens. Indeed, young people are a tremendous resource. They should not and cannot be ignored. Adults should utilize the talents of youths, for they are the leaders of tomorrow.

We cannot, however, reshape our social values overnight. This is a slow, deliberate process. Adults need to attain the courage and wisdom to accept the involvement of young people. Youths must develop their potential and take part in the world around them. Hopefully, we can begin to build a bridge of involvement and responsibility over the waters of apathy and alienation. By overcoming the obstacles together, youths **and** adults can reap the many benefits which are a direct result of their cooperation in the decision-making process.

14. Notes

[1]U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. *An Approach to Youth Participation.* Washington: Government Printing office, 1975, p. 2.

[2]Ibid., p. 4.

[3]Ibid., p. 5.

[4]The Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee. *Youth—Transition to Adulthood.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 2.

[5]Ibid.

[6]National Commission on Resources for Youth. *New Roles for Youth in Schools and Community.* New York: Citation Press, 1974.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Aurora Gallager, National Association of Counties Research Foundation. *Juvenile Delinquency: A Basic Manual for County Officials.* 1976, p. 6.

[9]Ibid., p. 5.

[10]Mark Chesler and Jon Schaller. *Student and Youth Organizing.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Youth Liberation Press, 1977, pp. 29-31.

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